

Cultural Diversity in Vermont

Diversity in Vermont Today

The Vermont population is 621,116 according to the 2004 Census Bureau estimate. Of this population, about three percent are considered to be racial and ethnic minorities, (compared with about one percent in the 1990 census). These include the African-American, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Hispanic/Latino populations. According to census data, Vermont's non-white population increased by nearly 13,000 people from 1990 to 2000, growing from 6,907 to 19,619. The Hispanic/Latino population in Vermont grew much faster than the population as a whole during the 1990's, increasing from 3,661 to 5,504, a more than fifty percent increase.

New Arrivals

According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, an average of 800 immigrants enter Vermont each year. New arrivals include refugees, immigrants, people with work visas, and students. Approximately 250-300 new refugees relocate to Vermont each year, and during the past 25 years, more than 5,000 refugees have settled here. They belong to a variety of cultural communities based on geography, religion, tribal affiliation, political affiliation, and other cultural descriptors.

The Vermont Department of Health's Refugee Health Program has more information about specific refugee issues and translated fact sheets related to health issues for children and adults.

Non-racial Minorities

There are also non-racial minorities in Vermont. These include the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender populations as well as minority linguistic groups.

The 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that although only one percent of youth in grades eight through twelve describe themselves as gay or lesbian, three percent describe themselves as bisexual and three percent say they are unsure.

Although many new arrivals and ethnic populations speak limited English or English as a second language, there are also populations in Vermont that have been resident for several generations, and continue to depend on their first language. For example, the French Canadian population of Vermont, while predominantly English speaking, will often communicate in Quebecois.

Cultural Competency

It is important to understand cultural differences and become culturally competent in order to provide the best care to all, regardless of race, origin, gender, age, religion, or sexual orientation. Cultural competence does not mean knowing everything about every culture, and it does not mean "treating everyone the same way". It does mean understanding that beliefs and attitudes about health, illness and medical treatment vary from culture to culture and that, as a result, responses to health care providers and to treatment may vary as well. It also means being curious about other cultures, becoming aware of one's own cultural biases, and being sensitive to cultural differences while avoiding stereotypes.

We have provided a number of tools to assist you with becoming more culturally competent. These tools include cultural profiles of some of the ethnic groups whose numbers in Vermont are increasing. It is important to remember that these are general overviews designed to increase awareness of some possible differences. They should not be used to stereotype individuals, to make assumptions which may not hold true, or as a substitute for asking questions. If you are interested in learning more, the following websites offer additional resources.

American Medical Student Association:

Cultural Competency in Medicine

<http://www.amsa.org/programs/gpit/cultural.cfm>

Cross Cultural Health Care Program – Seattle WA:

<http://www.xculture.org/>

University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey:

Center for Cultural Competency

<http://www.umdnj.edu/culturalcompetency/>

National Center for Cultural Competence:

<http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/nccc/>

EthnoMed:

<http://www.ethnomed.org/>

Provider's Guide to Quality & Culture:

<http://erc.msh.org/mainpage.cfm?file=1.0.htm&module=provider&language=English&ggroup=&mgroup>

AAP Cultural Competency Checklist

<http://www.medicalhomeinfo.org/training/materials/April2004Curriculum/Common%20Elements/CE%20Appendices/App%20J%20-%20Promoting%20Cultural%20Diversity%20and%20Cultural%20Competency.doc>